**A Faculty Remembrance of Minor Myers jr.**

**by Michael Young**

**Professor of History**

It is both a privilege and a daunting assignment to express what the faculty of Illinois Wesleyan University felt for Minor Myers jr. Like the rest of you, we assemble here to celebrate Minor’s life while we are still mourning his death and struggling for the words to say good-bye.  
  
The faculty, I’m glad to say, helped bring Minor to our campus in the first place. In 1988 the Board of Trustees appointed a search committee consisting of seven trustees which was augmented by the inclusion of five faculty and two students. It was remarkably enlightened on the part of the Trustees to give faculty and students equal representation at the table. As it turned out, this was an omen of the shared purpose and accomplishment that would characterize the next fourteen years.  
  
I was fortunate to be one of the faculty members on that search committee (along with David Bailey in Chemistry, Margaret Chapman in Economics, Bruce Criley in Biology, and Pam Muirhead in English). And I remember the first time we met Minor. We had been interviewing candidates in Chicago for two days; and there was some difficulty locating our final candidate, number 118. We milled about in the hallway, half hoping that number 118 might be a "no-show," so we could quit for the day, but then he materialized. Number 118 had a sly smile and inquisitive eyes that caught your attention. His face was youthful but his hair prominently gray. As he spoke, I jotted in the margin of my notes the names he mentioned—John Locke, Edmund Burke, Beethoven, Aristotle—not names we were used to hearing from other candidates. Minor impressed us with his encyclopedic knowledge, his enthusiasm for the liberal arts, and, above all, his dreams for us. He exhorted us to have more confidence in ourselves, to aim higher. What would work best for us, he said, was quality.  
  
After Minor’s appointment as President, we learned that this was not just empty talk. He set out to make the dreams reality. It is true that several initiatives had already begun, and Minor’s predecessors had laid strong foundations. And it is true that this was a group effort involving the whole administration, the Trustees, faculty, staff, students, alums, and philanthropic donors. But I don’t think anyone would deny that the key ingredients in our progress were Minor’s energy and vision.  
  
The most tangible results of that energy and vision are the buildings: the Shirk Center where we sit now, the Center for Natural Sciences, the Hansen Student Center, and—most appropriately—Ames Library. As most of you know, Minor loved books. He was determined to give this university a library it could be proud of. He persisted even when it looked increasingly impractical to embark on such an expensive project. And aren’t we all now unspeakably glad that he prevailed in this particular dream? Glad to have this magnificent building, but even gladder to know that Minor lived to see it.  
  
Yet the essence of a university, Minor was fond of saying, was not bricks and mortar but its faculty; and in this respect too, he was a builder. Minor was appalled at the small number of faculty at IWU, and he happily endorsed plans for a dramatic increase. Under Minor the number of tenure-line faculty grew from about 124 to 160. And most of those positions were filled or refilled under Minor. The overwhelming majority of our present faculty, over 100 0f the 160, were hired by Minor. In this way we are, quite literally, Minor’s faculty.  
  
Minor didn’t just hire more of us; he paid us better. When Minor became president, the average salary for tenure-line faculty was around $33,000. Today it is just over $60,000. That’s an increase of over 80%. Furthermore, Minor enthusiastically supported a reduction in the standard teaching load from seven to six courses per year.  
  
Now it may seem crass to mention these mundane numbers on such a solemn occasion, so let me explain further. Minor appreciated and rewarded us. And in so doing, he enabled us to be better teachers, scholars, artists, spouses, parents, and human beings. He improved our working conditions, and he improved our lives. And one thing that certainly should be said here today is: "Thank you, Minor."  
  
But statistics, of course, do not tell the whole story. While Minor enhanced our tangible resources, he also gave us intangible benefits. Minor set the tone on campus. He encouraged us. He made us believe in ourselves and in our institution. In more ways than one, he lifted us up.  
  
And one more thing Minor gave us: time. As we reckon our debts to Minor in this respect, we should also express our gratitude to his family for sharing so much of this extraordinary man’s life with us.  
  
I do not mean to create the impression that Minor and the faculty were two separate entities. He was one of us, not President Myers or even Dr. Myers, but just Minor. He would drop by your office, call you, send you a note, attend your presentations or performances. Minor’s chief opportunity to act as part of the faculty occurred every month when he chaired our faculty meetings. He ran those meetings with good humor, wry asides, and occasional anecdotes that showed he never lost his youthful idealism about the influence a teacher can have on a young person’s life. At more ceremonial events, he presided with grace and wit, dressed in his academic regalia, the orange and black colors of his Princeton Ph.D., which he jokingly called his "Halloween costume." Minor had risen through the professorial ranks, starting at the very bottom as an instructor of government. This is more exceptional than you might imagine. About the time we hired Minor, over 40% of college presidents did not have Ph.Ds. Minor was the strongest possible case for the argument that the best college president will be someone who started as a dyed-in-the-wool teacher and scholar. Minor taught no formal courses on our campus, but he visited many of ours, and he never stopped teaching and learning outside the classroom. Minor personified intellectual curiosity. No one could speak with him without learning something, but his influence on students was most remarkable for a college president. In phrases that are now well known, he urged students to follow their passions, to cultivate multiple interests, and (as we have just heard) to do well, but more importantly, to do good. In all these ways, Minor never stopped being a professor.  
  
That is why we feel Minor’s loss so personally. We have lost far more than a president. We have lost a luminous and congenial presence among us. We have lost a colleague who represented all that is best in our profession. We have lost a friend.  
  
What we have gained from having known Minor still stands, however. Today we begin a new school year with fine buildings, outstanding faculty, smaller classes, a richer curriculum, and superb students on a campus where the liberal arts flourish. As Minor predicted, quality did work for IWU. As a benchmark to gauge our progress along the way, Minor often cited Williams College in Massachusetts. People joked that maybe the initials IWU stood for Illinois Williams University. But Minor always respected Illinois Wesleyan’s unique history and character. In his first speech to the Board of Trustees, he quoted the political philosopher Edmund Burke to signal that he intended to build on our existing strengths rather than re-make us from the ground up. Indeed, what lured Minor here in the first place was his perception that we already had the ingredients to become a first-rate institution. He was our Thomas Jefferson. We would become his University of Virginia.  
  
When we interviewed candidates in 1989, we had several standard questions, including this one: if you obtain this job, what would you like to be remembered for when it’s over? In answer to that question, candidate number 118 replied, "I would like to be remembered as the president who put the elements together to give you national, not just regional, recognition." Today, fourteen years later, at the sudden end of that presidency, we salute you, Minor, for achieving that goal. You did well. But more importantly you did good. And if I may add on behalf of all those attending here today, you did it with a style, a verve, a spirit, a panache, that none of us will ever equal or forget.